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PP RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHUJA #0925 1481405  
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P 281405Z MAY 09 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6124  
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 1389  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0322  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0420  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0379  
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC

UNCLAS ABUJA 000925

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT PASS TO USTDA-MARIN; EXIM-RICHTER  
DEPT PASS USAID AFR/SD FOR CURTIS AND ATWOOD  
BAGHDAD FOR MCCULLOUGH  
ROME PASS TO TSA - ANTHONY GIOVANNIELLO  
DAKAR PASS TO FAA - MOIRA KEANE  
DOT FOR FAA MEL CINTRON, AHARRIS  
DOC FOR 3317/ITA/OA/KAREN BURRESS AND 3130/USFC/OIO/ANESA/MCREED

E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [ERTD](#) [EINV](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: MINISTER MAY DENY CONTINENTAL AIRLINE'S NEW ROUTE

REF: A. ABUJA 612  
    1B. ABUJA 592  
    1C. ABUJA 456  
    1D. ABUJA 361  
    1E. 06 LAGOS 1648  
    1F. 06 LAGOS 1646  
    1G. 05 LAGOS 2029

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; BUSINESS PROPRIETARY INFORMATION; NOT  
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1. (SBU) During the course of a May 11 meeting arranged so that a U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator could brief Minister of Aviation Babatunde Omotoba on the status of reviews into the crashes of a two Nigerian Airlines several years ago, the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) thanked Omotoba for approving Delta Airlines for commencement of the New York - Abuja operation into Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja on 8th June, 2009 (reftel A). DCM then asked the status of Diplomatic Note 2009-531 dated April 28 conveying Continental Airlines' request to open a route between Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Lagos and Newark, New Jersey. Omotoba responded that he would not approve any new service by U.S. airlines, including Continental and United (which had approached him personally), until the U.S. grants a FAA Category 1 rating to Nigeria. He complained that U.S. carriers would take all the passenger traffic from Nigeria to the U.S., depriving Nigerian carriers of the chance to earn revenue. DCM explained what the Ambassador has told him many times (reftel A) that Category I and Nigeria's obligations under the Open Skies Agreement represent two different processes, and issuance of Category 1 cannot be held over the heads of U.S. carriers.

2. (SBU) Comment. Omotoba continues to avoid the fact that Category 1 is earned and not purchased. He is clearly pressured by the Nigerian carriers, particularly Arik Airline, and their investors to pave the way by the end of the year for a Nigerian airline to land on U.S. soil. The Minister is also hosting discussions with developers and airport operators globally to invest in much needed aviation infrastructure build-out. Category 1 undoubtedly plays into the interest of potential investors adding even more pressure on the minister. In addition, at a May 27 event for the signing of a General Electric (GE) MOU with the Government of Nigeria, Chairman of Arik Airline, Sir Joseph Arumemi-Johnson, noted to Ambassador his goal of having his airline land in New York by October 2009. Ambassador re-stressed not only Category 1 but TSA Rules will need to apply. End Comment.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.

SANDERS